

hung the life of the inmates. Many of the gentry took to the woods, whose friendly shelter was in those days near at hand for all in danger and distress. Where the villein and the outlaw had wandered in May, the seigneur hid in June. The poet Grower has illuminated his long and wearisome Latin epic on the Peasants' Rising by a single passage of intense interest. He describes, in the first person, the sufferings of those who had to hide from the rebels in the woods and wastes. In the seclusion of the forest his poetical nature is unmoved by the beauties of glade and dell; he feels only the weary horror of the wet woods, the fear of death that dogs his failing footsteps through the brake, the hunger that drives him to gnaw the acorns with the herds of swine and deer.¹ But although the upper classes did well to fly for their lives, death was not the certain fate of those who were taken. There was no attempt to annihilate a caste, no indiscriminate massacre of landlords or gentlemen. Some, if personally unpopular, were murdered on the spot, and their heads carried round on poles in ferocious triumph. But many were spared on condition of surrendering obnoxious charters and documents, or of supplying food and money. Some were forced by the rebels to march with them, or even to assume apparent command, so as to take away from the rebellion the character, too obvious in the rural districts, of a rising of the lower classes. In East Anglia several gentlemen were of their own free will among the rebels, and some even seem to have been among the original instigators and leaders.² Imagination alone can at this distance of time supply the reasons of their sympathy with the insurgents.

The rising stands in these respects in strong contrast to the Jacquerie that devastated France after the battle of Poitiers. Goaded to madness by the miseries of the English war, starved, trodden under foot by their own seigneurs, pillaged and harried by the chivalry of the two nations, the French peasantry turned savagely on the classes at whose hands they had suffered such intolerable wrongs. * Wherever they went/ says Froissart, '... all of their rank of life followed them, whilst every one else fled, carrying off with

* *Vox Clam.* bk. i. cap. xvi,

• Powell